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ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS AGENCY ANNOUNCES NINE NEW FOREST RESERVES AND SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Secretary Gollidge announces comprehensive management approach for 500,000 acres of state-owned forest land.

Environmental Affairs Secretary Robert W. Gollidge, Jr. today announced a comprehensive forest management approach for the 500,000 acres of state-owned forestland. This balanced approach is based on input from forest scientists and hundreds of comments from the public over the past three years. The approach includes implementing sustainable harvesting on 80% of forested state lands (or "working woodlands"), coupled with the establishment of large and small reserves, where no commercial harvesting would occur, on the remaining 20%.

"This approach will ensure that we have balanced and sustainable habitats, including very young and very old forests. With carefully planned sustainable forestry we can restore forests and harvest renewable forest products to support our rural forest economies. Forest Reserves will allow us to study natural processes on unharvested lands and to apply this knowledge to our managed woodlands," said Gollidge.

Department of Fish and Game Commissioner David Peters said "The Department of Fish and Game is pleased to be a partner in the preservation of forest reserves and the creation of sustainable, working forests on the 160,000 acres managed by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Active, sustainable harvesting of forested areas combined with preservation of reserves will conserve habitat for all kinds of wildlife native to Massachusetts."

Secretary Gollidge announced the establishment of nine large Forest Reserves totaling about 50,000 acres or 10% of the state's forestland. These sections of large state forested properties are located at Mt. Greylock State Reservation, Mohawk/Monroe/Savoy State Forests, Chalet and Stafford Hill Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), Mt. Washington and Mt. Everett State Forests and Jug End State Reservation and WMA, Middlefield State Forest, Otis State

Forest, Gilbert Bliss State Forest and Hiram Fox WMA, Ware River Watershed Forest and Myles Standish State Forest. Additional smaller Forest Reserves (in the range of tens to hundreds of acres each) will be mapped and established as Forest Management Plans are completed for all state properties over the next 2-3 years. These Reserves will be located around local sensitive resource areas such as wetlands, steep slopes and certain sensitive rare species habitat. It is estimated that these additional Reserves will total approximately 10% of state lands.

“The identification and delineation of DCR large-scale forest reserves is one of the most important visionary contributions to biodiversity in Massachusetts,” said DCR Commissioner Burren. “Having large forested areas where nature processes will take their course over time will provide potential late successional forest habitat, critically important baseline data and opportunities for the public to experience primitive recreational experiences.”

William Hull, CEO of Hull Forest Products Inc. which owns over 8,000 acres of “working forest” in Massachusetts that is “Green Certified” under FSC strict standards said of this EOE initiative: “Massachusetts State forest lands are embarking on a long overdue new paradigm. This model sets aside carefully selected areas as preserves while simultaneously increasing sustainable management on the remaining 80% of State Lands with third party certification through the FSC program. It’s a win-win deal.”

The balance of “Working Forests” and “Forest Reserves” also helps the state maintain its prestigious status as “Green Certified” under the high standards of the Forest Stewardship Council’s certification program. Green Certification is the highest environmental forestry designation. The state received the designation – one of only a handful of states in the nation – in May of 2004 after a forest management review by the Scientific Certification Systems, an approved auditor of the independent Forest Stewardship Council.

The designation requires the state to complete forest management plans for all 500,000 acres within five years, and to establish a system of representative forest reserves to be set aside from commercial forestry. The designation of *reserve* signifies those areas where management focuses on restoring native habitat, removing foreign “invasive species” and studying natural disturbance processes in forest ecosystems. The results of these studies will help improve sustainable forestry practices on “working woodlands”.

Massachusetts has conducted a scientific analysis of forestlands that are appropriate for increased sustainable forestry and forest reserves. In conducting this analysis, agencies used The Nature Conservancy’s existing scientific data on Massachusetts’ forests to identify about 10% of state forestlands as large reserve sites, saving the state both time and resources. In completing forest management plans, the state estimates that another 10% of the forests will be designated in small reserves around specific unique resources such as rare species habitat.

The purpose of the large reserves is to study natural processes that will help improve sustainable forestry practices on state lands, create needed “old forest” habitat areas and to offer the public outstanding examples of the major forest types in Massachusetts. The state is working with scientists at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in completing baseline inventories

and setting up a long term monitoring program for these Reserves and companion Working Forests. The state will ask for assistance from the private sector in completing this long-term project.

Equally important to establishing reserves in this comprehensive plan, is fully implementing sustainable forestry on the remaining 400,000 acres of state land. Forest analysis and public meetings have already begun, and are helping to complete plans that will guide this management, which is also reviewed by the independent Forest Stewardship Council annually. Currently, state-of-the-art forestry occurs on portions of lands where sustainable forestry is appropriate. As plans are completed, the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Department of Fish and Game will expand this management to additional lands while keeping harvest levels within sustainable limits. Sustainable management maintains vigorous forests, provides clean drinking water, and enhances wildlife habitat for a wide range of species. Sustainable management also helps support local economies and will make the Commonwealth less dependent on imported forest products, which are often harvested under poor environmental oversight. Although Massachusetts is the eighth most forested state in the U.S., its forests currently supply less than 5% of its citizens' forest product needs. Conversely, New Hampshire supplies 100% of its forest products needs.

Sustainable forestry can also play a key role in preservation. Forest advocates hope to follow the lead of the Massachusetts' agricultural industry, which helps protect farmland from development by keeping farms viable as businesses. These efforts have helped sustain the farmland base, and have raised Massachusetts to third in the nation in direct local farm sales. As part of this effort, EOEA has recently awarded 10 grants totaling 625 acres for its new Forest Viability Program that will complete sustainable forest business plans and provide implementation funding in exchange for 20-year no-development covenants held by the state.

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